



Putting adaptive capacity into the context of people's lives: A case study of two flood-prone communities in Puerto Rico

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Abstract:

Recent developments in the vulnerability literature have contested the use of technical solutions as the sole adaptive strategies to reduce natural hazard impact; this literature emphasizes the need to attend to the wider everyday risks to which people are exposed and that aggravate hazard vulnerability. Using a case study of two flood-prone communities in Puerto Rico, this article supports and enhances that literature by placing floods within a wider context of other risks and determining how everyday risks influence people's perceptions of and capacity to adapt to floods. Participatory methods are used to elicit the everyday risks that concern community members. The analysis reveals that participants perceive floods as one of their risks, but they see them as neither the most important nor most severe risk in their lives. Instead, they find other concerns-health conditions, family well-being, economic factors, and land tenure-more pressing. These competing risks limit adaptive capacity and increase vulnerability to natural hazards. The results suggest that addressing these multiple risks, mainstreaming flood management and adaptation into the wider context of people's general well being, and increasing risk perception will strengthen adaptive capacity to present and future floods.

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Resource Description

Communication: ☒

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience: ☒

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

Exposure : ☒

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event, Precipitation, Temperature

Extreme Weather Event: Flooding, Hurricanes/Cyclones

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Temperature: Fluctuations

Geographic Feature: 

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Ocean/Coastal

Geographic Location: 

resource focuses on specific location

United States

Health Impact: 

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

General Health Impact, Mental Health/Stress, Morbidity/Mortality, Other Health Impact

Mental Health Effect/Stress: Stress Disorder

Other Health Impact: Well-being

Mitigation/Adaptation: 

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern: 

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly, Workers

Other Vulnerable Population: Education status

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience: 

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: 

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resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content